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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/RPM, EUR/SCE

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TAGS: PREL MARR NATO HR

SUBJECT: NATO'S MIXED MESSAGE TO CROATIA

Classified By: Poloff Justin Friedman, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (U) This is an Action Request - see para 3.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY and COMMENT: NATO DSYG Minuto Rizzo made a brief stop in Zagreb on November 11 on a whirlwind tour of MAP countries Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia. Minuto Rizzo carried a useful message about NATO being a community of values. It was incumbent on aspirant countries to demonstrate that they shared these values and assume the responsibility to become security providers. However, Minuto Rizzo's message that defense reform was less urgent than the political dimension to Croatia's NATO aspirations directly undermined post's efforts to light a fire under senior GOC officials to start moving on reforms and make faster progress in achieving MAP goals. END SUMMARY and COMMENT.

¶3. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Under- or de-emphasizing defense reform runs counter to our efforts in Croatia. Post believes Department should consider asking the NATO International Staff to reaffirm with the Croatian authorities the importance of defense reform.

¶4. (C) NATO DSYG Alessandro Minuto Rizzo briefed NATO member state Ambassadors and DATTS on November 11 on his meetings that day with Croatian President Mesic and Prime Minister Sanader. Minuto Rizzo said he has been telling his interlocutors (in Zagreb as well as in Tirana and Skopje) that he was coming with a message of encouragement for NATO candidate countries. He emphasized that NATO was not just a military organization but a political organization and a community of values. NATO was very different from the EU as it was the only place where European and North American countries come together to work on foreign policy, security, defense, and civil emergency response issues. NATO had considerable expertise in these issues and could be of assistance to aspirant countries.

¶5. (C) Minuto Rizzo reported that PM Sanader said that he wanted to intensify Croatia's activities with NATO and become a member as soon as possible. Sanader said that the Croatian public was not against membership, just not enthusiastic. The opening of EU membership negotiations had given public support for the EU a big boost, and Sanader wants and expects the same to occur with NATO. Minuto Rizzo concluded that he and NATO international staff needed to return and do more public diplomacy work, urging the assembled ambassadors to do more to raise public awareness of NATO.

¶6. (C) Sanader asked about Croatia's weak points in the path toward membership. Minuto Rizzo said that he responded that the key areas remain dealing with refugee return, reform of the judiciary, corruption, and cooperation with the ICTY. On defense reform, Minuto Rizzo said that Croatia had progressed considerably. He said he told Sanader and Mesic that Croatia

should not aim for a big army, but a small, flexible, sustainable, and deployable force ready to work on NATO operations. Croatia needs to focus on usability, not high technology equipment.

¶7. (C) In his meeting with President Mesic, Minuto Rizzo briefed that Mesic was focused on defense reform, marking the considerable progress Croatia has made in downsizing the military. Mesic complained that the government was not providing enough resources for defense reform/transformation.

Minuto Rizzo said that he responded that defense reform was not as important as achieving a change in mentality to assume the responsibilities of becoming a security provider.

¶8. (C) Privately, many of the assembled Ambassadors were disappointed in Minuto Rizzo's report. The UK, Canadian, Romanian, and Norwegian Ambassadors, as well as the Polish Polcouns all told PolOff that Minuto Rizzo had not been helpful with the message he delivered de-emphasizing the importance of defense reform. Several noted that the key to achieving the flexibility and deployability Minuto Rizzo had called for is precisely in the defense reform process which is moving slowly now in Croatia.

DELAWIE